



Communicating During a Crisis

The COVID-19 Pandemic

By Keith Kitani, CEO of GuideSpark



When a crisis hits, employees look to their companies as one of the trusted sources of information they can rely on to protect themselves and keep informed.

As leaders, we have a responsibility to communicate early, accurately and frequently about the situation. Here are some of the best practices to communicate on COVID-19 (“Coronavirus”) with your teams.



Align and **Distribute Quickly**

One of the key factors to ensuring that what we're communicating accurately and timely is to first align as a leadership team on the communication plan, what information will be provided and the communication schedule.

Once this is determined, it's equally as important to distribute information quickly, using a variety of digital channels where employees are most apt to receive it. This can include email, portals and collaboration sites. Physical signage may be necessary as well. In the case of COVID-19, this might also take the form of health and sanitation notices in bathrooms or the lobby.



Provide Clear, **Frequent Updates**

As with any active crisis, situations can change quickly and often, so communication frequency is also paramount.

Without ongoing communication, employees will “fill in the gaps” with other sources of information, which could create confusion. It’s important to be clear, even when things are fluid. In the example of COVID-19, companies may be taking a variety of steps as they assess recommendations from **health agencies and government officials. Clarify with employees that these** steps may change and outline what future actions might be taken depending on the status of the situation.

It’s critical to remain factual. One of the best ways to do this is to always include links to sites such as the CDC, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and WHO, the World Health Organization. The reason is two-fold: **first, companies are not in a position to offer medical advice but can share** information found on this type of site along with additional information and second, this information is continually updated.



Customize the Message

Our employees are diverse, so we need to take that into account in our communications.

Craft communications based on employee audiences e.g. job level or **corporate offices versus factory workers. One of the best vehicles to** communicate through is front-line managers, who garner a lot of trust among their teams. Communicate the strategy to your managers, educate them on the proper ways to handle these situations and give them all the tools to communicate with their teams to further build their trust.

Seeing the situation from their employees' perspectives, they will want messaging that answers questions around, working from home options, travel, what happens if an employee gets sick, caring for family members and dealing with school closures. Getting communication out to diverse groups in ways they will receive and digest the information is critical in a crisis.



Get Feedback and **Measure Sentiment**

As the COVID-19 pandemic has shown us, these situations evolve rapidly, so we shouldn't assume our communication is a "one-and-done" event.

It should be an ongoing, continuous journey that we help our employees through. One common myth about communication is that "I've sent it, so now I've communicated." What business leaders need to know is whether employees have digested, understood and taken action on our communication. Best practices indicate that we should get feedback and measure engagement, both quantitatively and qualitatively to make adjustments as needed.



Stay Calm and **Help Others**

While this sounds like motherhood and apple pie, employees are looking to companies for reassurance during difficult times.

I've found that staying calm during these situations helps my management team and I set the tone for the rest of the organization. Employees also look for ways they can help during a crisis. We see GuideSpark as one family: employees and customers and that's why we designed a complimentary communication solution that directly addresses COVID-19 for our customers. We're in this together and we want to make sure our customers know that when it comes to their employees, they can count on us to be their communication partner.

While a crisis is never easy, one common thread we all have is the **need to be informed.**

As business leaders, we can and should provide that communication layer to all of those who intersect our companies. It's important to build a crisis and change-ready organization so that we can all help our employees weather the storms of life and work.



Accelerating change effectiveness through **communication.**